

ANIMALS

ANIMALS IN JAPAN.

217

ANIMALS IN JAPAN.

[From MacFarlane's "Japan," recently published by George P. Putnam & Co., we take an interesting chapter on the natural history of the country.]

Though abundantly stocked with pictures and carvings, with chimeras and all other sorts of monsters, borrowed from the Chinese, the Japanese empire is but sparingly provided with four-footed beasts, wild or tame. The country is too much cultivated and peopled to afford cover to the wild quadrupeds, and the tame are bred only for carriage and agriculture. The use of animal food is interdicted by the national religion, and they have not left pasture enough to support many sheep and oxen. The horses are generally small, but there is a breed said to be not inferior to that imported into India from the Persian Gulf. But the horses of this kind now appear to be rare. In the time of old Captain Saris they were common enough. "Their horses are not tall, but of the size of our middling nags, short, and well trussed, small headed, and full of mettle, in my opinion far excelling the Spanish jennet in pride and stomach." The Japanese relate most marvellous stories of the performance of some of their steeds. There is also a breed of ponies, which, though small, has been much admired. Oxen and cows are kept only for ploughing and for carriage. Of milk and butter the Japanese know nothing. They have a large humped buffalo, sometimes of a monster size, which they train to draw carts or to carry heavy goods on their backs. The elephant, the camel, and the ass, are unknown animals. Sheep and goats were kept formerly at the Dutch settlements, in the neighborhood, of which some few may yet be found. They may be bred in the country to great advantage, if the natives were permitted to eat the flesh, or knew how to manage or manufacture the wool. They have a few swine, which were brought over from China, and which some of the country people near the coast still keep, not, indeed, for their own use, but to sell to certain Chinese junks which are allowed to come over to trade, most of the Chinese mariners being addicted to pork.

Dogs or common curs they have, and in superfluous numbers. These dogs are as much the pest of the towns of Japan as they are of Constantinople and the other foul cities and towns of the Ottoman empire. This vast increase of the canine species, and the encouragement and immunity accorded to it, arose (according to the popular account,) out of a curious superstition and an extravagant imperial decree. An emperor who reigned at the close of the eighteenth century chanced to be born under the Sign of the Dog, the Dog being one of the twelve celestial signs of the Japanese. For this reason, the emperor had as great an esteem for dogs as the Roman emperor Augustus is reported to have entertained for rams. When he ascended the throne, he willed and ordained that dogs should be held as sacred animals; and, from that time, more puppies saw the light and were permitted to live in Japan than in any other country on the face of the earth, Turkey, perhaps, excepted.

These dogs have no masters, but lie and prowl about the streets, to the exceeding great annoyance of passengers, especially if they happen to be foreign travellers, or Christians in Christian dresses. If they come round you in packs, barking, snarling, and showing their teeth,—nay, even if they fall upon you and bite you, you must on no account take the law into your own hands, and beat them off or shoot them. To kill one of them is a capital crime, whatever mischief the brute may have done you. In every town there are Guardians of the Dogs, and to these officers notice must be given in case of any canine misdemeanor, these guardians alone being empowered to punish the dogs. Every street must keep a certain number of these animals, or at least provide them with victuals; huts, or dog-hospitals, stand in all parts of the town, and to these the animals, in case of sickness, must be carefully conveyed by the inhabitants. The dogs that die must be carried up to the tops of mountains and hills, the usual burying places of men and women, and there be very decently interred. Old Kampfer says:—"The natives tell a pleasant tale on this head. A Japanese, as he was carrying the carcass of a dead dog to the top of a steep mountain, grew impatient, grumbled, and cursed the emperor's birth-day and whimsical command. His companion bid him hold his tongue and be quiet, and, instead of swearing, return thanks to the gods that the emperor was not born under the Sign of the Horse, for, in that case, the load would have been heavier."

We give the pleasant tale as we find it, but we do not believe that it points to the real origin of the superstitious regard for dogs, which many of the Mongol race share with the Japanese and Turks. That superstition had its origin in the wilds of Tartary, or in whatever other part of the world it was that served as the cradle and great starting point of the wide-spread Mongol race. The dog must have been in a manner deified, when they first put him among their celestial signs.

Among some of the Mongolian tribes, the dog is the indicator of fate, the harbinger of death; and among others, the dog is an object either of dread or devotion.

But our learned German is not always so facetious about this monstrous annoyance of street dogs. On reaching Nagasaki, he says, "The street dogs also deserve to be noticed among the inhabitants of this city, they being full as well, nay, better maintained and taken care of than many of the people, and although the imperial orders on this head are not regarded and complied with at Nagasaki, with that strictness as they must be in other parts of the empire, which are not so remote from court, yet the streets be full of these animals, leading a most easy and independent life, giving way neither to men nor horses. The town is never without a great deal of noise from these animals."

The Japanese have no dogs of superior breed, but they have cats of a peculiarly beautiful kind. These are of a whitish color, with large yellow and black spots, and a very short tail: the ladies carry them about as lap-dogs.

In the islands are found deer, wild boars, and

hares, but apparently in no great numbers. There are also monkeys, wild dogs, foxes, some curious animals that look like a cross between the fox and the wolf, and a few small bears in the secluded parts of the northern provinces. The fox bears not the very best of characters among the Japanese; the peasantry believe him to be in league with all evil spirits or devils, and to be himself the very incarnation of craft, malice, and wickedness; "but," says old Kampfer, "the fox-hunters are expert in conjuring and stripping this animated devil, his hair and wool being much coveted for writing and painting pencils." The weasel and ferret are found. Rats and mice swarm throughout the country, for the beautiful cats, being pets, have no turn for mousing. The rats are tamed by the natives, and taught to perform several tricks, and form a common diversion for the poorer people. We find mention made of two small animals of a red color, that live under the roofs of the houses, and are very tame. They are called the *itutz* and the *tin*.

The destructive white ant, that great annoyance of most parts of the East Indies, is very common. The Japanese call them *do toas* or piercers, a name they well merit; for they perforate whatever they meet, stones and metals only excepted, and when once they get into a merchant's warehouse, they in a very short compass of time can destroy or ruin an amazing quantity of his best goods. Nothing has been yet found that will keep them off, except salt laid under the goods and spread about them. The common European ants are their mortal enemies, and wherever these have been introduced, the *do toas* have rapidly disappeared, like the original English rat before the invasion of the Norwegian.

The islands, however, may be said to be remarkably free from insects and obnoxious reptiles. There are but few snakes, and hardly any of them appear to be venomous. One of these is of a beautiful green color, with a very flat head. Japanese soldiers cook it and eat its flesh, in the belief that it imparts courage and audacity. The natives also calcine the flesh in an earthen pot hermetically sealed, and derive from it a powder, which they believe to possess the most extraordinary medicinal virtues. There is a water snake of monstrous size; and another very large snake, of black color, but quite inoffensive, is found in the mountains. Both are very scarce, and when taken are shown about for money.

Birds are rather numerous. Of tame poultry they keep only fowls and ducks. They sell them sometimes to foreigners, but never eat them. Cocks are highly prized by the religious orders, because they mark the time, and foretell changes of the weather. Indeed, they are chiefly kept up as *time-keepers*.

The crane is the chief of the wild birds of the country; but like the heron, and the stork, which also abound, they can scarcely be called wild, for they are held as sacred birds, and nobody must injure or molest them. They thus become quite familiar, and mix with the people, and throng the market-places, just as the storks do in all towns, villages, and bazaars in Turkey, where they are equally objects of affection and veneration. No doubt this feeling also had its rise in

the Tartarian regions. When the conquering Turks first came into Europe, they were accustomed to say that the stork had a singular affection for their race, and that whithersoever they might carry their victorious arms, the stork would follow them and live with them. In Japan the country people never call the crane by any other name than that of *O Tsurisama*, "My great lord crane." There are two sorts of them: one white as snow, and the other gray. They portend good fortune, and long life. For this reason the imperial apartments, the walls of temples, and other happy places, are commonly adorned with figures of them. Cranes are also painted on dishes and drinking cups, and reproduced on articles of domestic furniture. We have seen native paintings of these birds that are exquisitely beautiful, as true and correct in drawing as beautiful in finish and coloring. They are among the very best specimens of Japanese art.

The tortoise is another happy and sacred creature, and is represented on walls, and reproduced in the same manner.

Wild geese and wild ducks are very abundant, and very tame. There are several species of both. One kind of duck is of immense size and of wonderfully brilliant and beautiful plumage. Pheasants, wild pigeons, and woodcocks, are very common birds. Hawks also are common. Ravens are scarce. Our common European crows, as also parrots, and other Indian birds, are never to be met with.

Of singing birds, Kampfer mentions only larks and nightingales; but he says that both of these sing more sweetly than with us. The natives highly prize the nightingale, and large sums are paid for a caged one, with a good voice.

They have plenty of bees, and, consequently, honey and wax are produced.

The shrill cicala, or winged-grasshopper, peoples the pines, and fills the woods and mountains with its incessant song. Butterflies and beetles are numerous and diversified, some of both kinds being very beautiful. Among the night-moths there is one sort which the Japanese ladies keep in little cages, as pets and curiosities. This moth is about four inches long, slender, round-bodied, with four wings, two of which are transparent, and concealed under the other pair of wings, which shine like polished metal, and are most curiously and beautifully adorned with blue and gold lines and spots. The following graceful fable owes its origin to the matchless beauty of this moth: All other night-flies fall in love with it; and to get rid of their importunities it maliciously bids them, as a trial of their devotion and constancy, to go and fetch it fire. The blind lovers, obedient to command, fly to the nearest lamp or candle, and never fail to get burned to death.

The sea all about Japan is plentifully stocked with all sorts of fish, and the natives are very expert fishermen. In the time of Charlevoix and Kampfer, and earlier travellers, the whale fishery was carried on to a great extent, particularly in the sea which washes the southern coasts of the great island, Nippon. The common way of catching them was by harpooning, in the manner of our Greenland fishermen; but the Japanese

boats seemed to be fitter for the purpose than ours, being small, narrow, tapering at each end into a sharp point, and rowing with incredible swiftness. "About 1680, a rich fisherman, in the province of Omura, found out a new way of catching whales with nets made of strong ropes, about two inches thick. This method was afterwards followed with good success by another man of the country. They say that, as soon as the whale finds its head entangled in a net, he cannot, without great difficulty, swim away or dive, and may be very easily killed with the harpoon in the common manner. The reason why this new method hath not been universally received is, because it requires a greater and much more expensive set of tackle than common fishermen can afford."

They enumerate six kinds of whales, differing in name, form, and size. Of all these several kinds, nothing was thrown away by the Japanese as useless. They boiled the fat or blubber into train oil; they pickled, boiled, roasted, or fried the flesh, and ate it; they even reduced the cartilaginous bones into food; they made cords, ropes, and strings for their musical instruments out of the nerves and tendons; they made a great use of the fins; and out of the jaw-bones, and other solid bones, they manufactured numerous articles, particularly their fine steelyards for weighing their gold and silver.

The Japanese fishermen attribute to the flesh of the whale, their favorite food, their strength and hardihood, and their extraordinary capability of enduring exposure to cold and foul weather.

It was in pursuing the whale to the coasts of Japan that the American ships met with those disasters, and that inhospitable treatment, which first made the government of the United States turn its attention in this direction.

Turtles of enormous size are said to abound on the southern or eastern coasts. Salmon, soles, turbot, a sort of cod, smelts, and other delicious sea fish, together with all sorts of lobsters, crabs, shrimps, oysters, muscles, &c., are taken in surprising abundance; and there are other fish of species unknown to us, and of which, some are said to be delicious. It is fortunate for the natives that their prejudices and superstitions allow them to eat fish. In the larger islands every part of the coast is thickly strewed with buildings, and at every second or third mile are populous villages, from which extensive fisheries are carried on. In fact, the Japanese are essentially *ichthyophagi*. Aided by a good growth of potatoes, or an adequate supply of rice, the sea alone would support a vast population.

